Fetichism.
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BY EDMUND QUINCY.

"Never did Art so well with Nature strive,
Nor ever idol seem'd so much alive:
So like a man, so golden to the sight; —
So base within, so counterfeit and light."—DRYDEN.

THE genesis of idolatry is a curious study. That men should select such ungainly, clumsy, frightful objects of worship, and invest them with such cruel, bloody, filthy attributes, does seem, at first, passing strange, and as if it must spring from some idiosyncrasy of barbarous nations. When at a Missionary Meeting some uncouth shape, before which the islands of the sea bow down and worship, is displayed by the Apostle on furlough, and the assembled multitude of Saints are told of the fierce

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and licentious qualities it embodies, the whole company is moved to astonishment, if not to tears, the strings of their purses are unloosed, and fresh offerings are laid on the altar for the deliverance of Heathendom from such a woe. And yet it may be that, in their own way, these very evangelizing Doctors in Divinity, and Deacons and Church-members, have just been doing what is quite as revolting in the eye of Pure Reason as this Monster-worship, and what would seem as barbarous and inexplicable to those very worshippers they are pleased to call barbarous, should the facts be laid before them. Idols are not, by any means, carved out of wood and stone only. They are, sometimes, incarnated in very substantial flesh and blood.

The Philosophy of all Idolatry is not hard to understand. Men make their gods in their own image, and then adore them for their resemblance to themselves. Their deities must necessarily bear a strong family resemblance to the worshippers, at least in mental and moral characteristics. The

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external form they may fashion into such shape as they think terrible or amiable; but the qualities shadowed forth are those they most prize in themselves. The Olympian Jove, the Phidian Venus, the Praxitelian Apollo, and the host of other deities of the elder world, were all but projections of the inner life of their worshippers. Odin did not drink blood out of the skulls of his enemies in the Valhalla, because he liked it; but because the Scandinavians did. So with all other false gods. No Iconoclasm can put down idolatry. It is only by the regeneration of the heart and mind, that the fierce and gloomy shadows that brood over the hearts of so many nations can be put to flight. The inner necessity ceasing, the external symbol of it will disappear at the same time. The guilt of Idolatry consists not so much in the mere bowing down to stocks and stones, as in the identifying with those graven images all that is worst in ourselves, and making that our god. The dishonor we do to the True God consists mainly in the deification of

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our own vices and bad qualities, and putting them upon His throne.

So with the Idols of Christendom. That worship is governed by the same laws as any other kind of Fetichism. Only our Fetiches are usually men of like passions with ourselves, and the worship we give them is thus divested of all *prestige* of imagination or antiquity. But a man represents us, and we deify him. Napoleon expressed the France of his day, and he still "rules her from his urn." Washington incarnated the Idea of Colonial Independence, and he has taken his place among the gods. Wellington gathered up the average of English feelings and ideas, and the great mass of the nation has accepted him as its Exponent. The idol reflects the features of the men that set him up, and they are thus bound to defend his godhead. An assault on their god is an attack upon themselves, and it is not merely piety, but self-defence, to repel it. They must prove his vices to be no vices, but the best of vir-

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tues, or he goes to the wall. Even if it be merely a senseless cry of "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" that they can raise to drown inquiry into his pretensions, they must keep it up for more than the space of two hours, or their crafts may be endangered; and not only their crafts, but their own pretence at self-respect — for that grim and ugly image is but their own, a little enlarged and improved. They made him, and they must stand by him or desert themselves.

This nation, very lately, set up a false god, and insists upon his divinity being recognized by all the inhabitants thereof. He had walked among us for more than forty years, but the country did not discover that he was of celestial mould until very lately. His godlike proportions and attributes did not develop themselves and announce the present god until about two years and a half ago. Then he looked upon the American People, and, lo! they saw their strengthened image in his face. He spoke, and they cried aloud, "It is the voice of a

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god, and not of a man!"—for it was the mere echo of their own sweet voices. To be sure, with one consent they refused to invest him with any gift of power; but, then, they tried to make amends by a universal chorus of praise. Hymns and hallelujahs resounded on all sides; and if he could have been content with breath, he had enough of it and to spare. Priests as well as people joined in this liturgy, and, since his death, as well as while he lived, if the voice of flattery could soothe that "dull cold ear," he would indeed rest in peace. And this was not confined to one part of the country. Grief for his death, embodied in words of hyperbolic adulation, was felt, or feigned, everywhere. Like himself, it knew "no North, no South, no East, no West!"

Now, there was a reason for this unanimity. Why did Charleston wring her hands and New Orleans rend her hair, when the news of his death reached them? They did not use to love him so.

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Why did Richmond and Boston weep upon one another's necks? Why did Nullifiers of the South take up the wail of the Cottonocracy at the North, and bear it on over the land? Whence this sudden opening of eyes which could before see no good thing coming forth from the New England Nazareth? The reason is plain enough. The South lived, and the North thrived, upon the sacrifice of every sixth man, woman, and child in the land. They had agreed to do it, they liked it, they called it Liberalism, National Spirit, and Enlightened Patriotism. Daniel Webster embodied this Spirit in his Speech of the Seventh of March. He incarnated the Surrender of the North to the South. There once had been some false pretences of a Northern Spirit, which would sometimes threaten to rouse and resist the outrages of Slavery. But Slavery had been ever predominant, nay, omnipotent, in the affairs of the Nation. Men were tired of a show of virtue when they had it not; and when Mr. Webster, as their fugleman, gave the

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signal, they were all ready and eager to obey it, and follow him whithersoever he went. They hoped, poor fools, that he and they would receive the gift of power and place and preëminence, as the reward of this confession of their meanness of spirit. They have had empty praise enough; but the promotion was reserved for older and better soldiers. Their mouths are filled with ashes, and all they have to do is to prove that it is the fruit of Paradise. In their own defence, they are obliged to maintain his impeccable character and his infallible wisdom, or they themselves must share the disgrace of their dishonored divinity. If he be not divine, why, what are they? If the idol be pulled down, it must fall on the heads of its worshippers. As they will not forsake it, they must uphold it.

But Time, the Iconoclast, sweeps silently onward, and with the very winnowing of his wings overturns Idol and Idol Temple. His path is strewed with the fragments of names once worshipped, of creeds once adored, of opinions once

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idolized, of reputations once omnipotent. Superstition, Despotic Power, more potent Poetry, Popular Acclamation, have all been interposed between the Avenger and their Idols, in vain. What he spares and seals, survives. It is he that is the true Fountain of Honor, — the real Source of Fame. At his command monarchs bow, and give precedence to their subjects. Ferdinand and Isabella are scarcely seen in the august presence of Columbus, and only as his servants and train-bearers. Elizabeth is but the handmaid of Shakspeare's Royalty. Milton sends Charles the Second anew into exile, and eclipses the glory of even Oliver himself. George, of the Name the Third, sneaks out of sight before the sublime shadows of Howard and of Clarkson. So ephemeral are the distinctions made by men, and so eternal those made by Genius and Goodness. They who enlighten and bless mankind take their place

"Among th' enthroned gods on sainted seats;"

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while the idols made by Kings or Mobs in their own image, to typify their vices or their crimes, totter and fall by the weight of their own weakness, shaming their worshippers, and are ground into dust by the hastening feet of thick-coming generations.

Dedham, Massachusetts, December 10, 1852.

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